

SB1085 Testimony - Support legalization of cannabis, oppose bill as written.

My name is Camille Kritzman. I live in Hartford and work with immigrant youth around Connecticut. I have also worked in the legal CT medical marijuana industry. I support legalization of cannabis, but I believe it must be done so in an equitable way that addresses the way the war on drugs has systematically damaged black and brown communities. I do not believe that SB1085 does enough to address the systemic damages done to black and brown communities by the war on drugs. I oppose this bill as written, in favor of a solution that offers equity.

This bill does not decriminalize distribution/intent to sell or cultivation. This bill just slightly increases decriminalization, and gives special privileges to current "licensed" distributors to engage in economic activity denied to others. Intent to sell is not decriminalized under this bill, **distribution first offense still carries jail time, with a mandatory minimum of 5+ years.** This is essentially a deportation order for non-citizens. SB1085 has a mandatory minimum for large scale distribution. Distribution and cultivation must be decriminalized, and those currently in prison must be released.

While millionaires profit from CT's legal medicinal marijuana sales, others are thrown in jail and deported for the same substance, which is ultimately a medicine for so many. We need to see legalization in a way that helps residents impacted by the war on drugs, not just to protect dispensary and medical grow operations owned by millionaires who are currently profiting off of criminalization, as SB1085 would. **This bill includes 4 pages on protecting current dispensary owners, but 0 pages on detailing who will be released from prison.** The priorities are clear.

Despite cannabis reforms happening across the nation, immigrants are being left behind, and they are still subject to extreme and permanent penalties for even very minor possession offenses.

US immigration law mandates detention, with no opportunity to apply for bond, for anyone (including lawful permanent residents) with a conviction for a controlled substance offense. Thus, immigrants who received no sentence, or relatively short criminal sentences for minor drug offenses can end up spending months or years in immigration detention. Immigrants who successfully complete drug diversion programs and have their convictions expunged can still end up deported and permanently separated from their families for these offenses. Even pardons do not eliminate the immigration consequences of a drug crime. The US is deporting a significant number of both permanent residents and undocumented individuals with strong family and community ties to the US, often for minor or old drug offenses.

The answer is to completely decriminalize cannabis to avoid the criminal justice system, and start healing communities and families that have been destroyed by the war on drugs, through meaningful equity measures that take into consideration ending the disparity in consequences for cannabis consumption for non-citizen residents of this state. Otherwise, we will continue to see CT families being ripped apart needlessly for non-violent drug offenses.

Thank you for your time in reading my testimony.